Jean Liberté

A MANIFESTO FOR THE RIGHT TO PAINLESS SUICIDE

JEAN LIBERTE

A manifesto for the right to painless suicide

A pro-choice essay on human dignity

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To human beings

PREFACE

« Il me semble d'ailleurs qu'on ne devrait lire que les livres qui vous mordent et vous piquent. Si le livre que nous lisons ne nous réveille pas d'un coup de poing sur le crâne, à quoi bon le lire (…)

un livre doit être la hache qui brise la mer gelée en nous.

Voilà ce que je crois »

Franz Kafka, extrait d'une lettre à son ami Oskar Pollak, 1904

« The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. »

Hamlet, Act II, scene 2

What if Jean Liberté's Manifesto were the very axe with which to break the frozen sea within us ? What if his essay were the very thing that catches our very conscience ?

What if the frozen sea within us were whatever teaching and preconceived ideas we have made ours ? Language is often the very cell we dwell in, a cell with its rules, with its inmates, with its screw, but like the prisoners of Plato's *Myth of the Cave* , we tend to mistake our jail for the real world despite the shadows of the real world that wave at us and which we are free to take heed of or not.

This Manifesto proposes to start us thinking, in Montaigne's tradition, no matter how much its contents will sting our conscience.

You may not agree with its thesis, or quite the contrary, it may shake you awake, like a Vanitas, dragging you from your Divertissement (Distraction), to refer to Blaise Pascal, but it would be a shame to discard it simply because it hurts mainstream thinking which you mistake for your own convictions.

Jean Liberté fulfills his philosopher's mission, namely, the one meant to diagnose our collective neurosis and offer his recommendation so that we may be brave enough to stare death in the face without leaving it to society or whoever that is to decide to tamper with our lives when we can no longer think for ourselves.

I do recommend this Manifesto to anyone aware that he is a human being and not an object, so that he may ponder the

very issue of death and his death while he may think. It is then up to him to decide whether or not he subscribes to Jean Liberté's thesis.

As for society and its legislators, this Manifesto is meant to wave at them too…

Jean-Claude Cauvin

An English translation of « *Manifeste Pour Un Droit Au Suicide Indolore* » by

Jean-Claude CAUVIN

Introductory texts

Suicide : self-homicide. That is why some regard it as a crime. That is why I, for one, regard it as a right.

« As I do not offend the laws implemented against thieves when I travel with my belongings or when I spend my own money, likewise, I do not infringe upon those laws against arsonists when I burn my own wood. I therefore do not feel concerned by the laws implemented against murderers if I put an end to my own life. » Montaigne, Essais II, 3.

Let us make sure however that such a consideration is not upheld as a sacred principle. It is neither ethics nor metaphysics.

To commit suicide does not mean choosing one's death (it is no choice of ours : we are bound to die anyway), but choosing the moment of one's death. It is a matter of opportunity rather than something pertaining to the absolute as some see it sometimes.

It is more or less a question of gaining time, of running ahead of the inevitable, of winning against nothingness, of winning the race against time and fate, so to speak. It is like taking a short cut as it were.

It is also an individual right, which is all the more absolute as it stands above the notion of right.

« The best gift bestowed on us by nature, according to Montaigne, is to have given us the opportunity to end our lives » (ibid).

It is the minimal and maximal freedom.

André Comte-Sponville, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*

In western societies devoid of legislation concerning the right to die, it is practically impossible to be entitled to a peaceful death.

Governments' logic is to leave people in utter ignorance so they live longer and happier : HOW WRONG !

Far from that, experience clearly shows that insofar as individuals access the necessary information to make a sensible decision, they tend not to worry so much. Knowing the ins and outs of our ageing and dying enables us to gain power. It is this very power which is the key to a longer and a happier life. CERTAINLY NOT IGNORANCE !

Philip Nitschke et Fiona Stewart, *Pilule Douce*

Cioran used to say : « without having heard of suicide, I would long ago have killed myself ». To this, I should like to add, if we were sure we had the right means to kill ourselves, we would not so much need to think about it ; we would be at liberty to think about it. The best way to undermine despair is to allow it to be considered. Knowing that one can die peacefully makes you feel like living.

Dominique Éddé, « Humaniser la mort » (article paru dans Libération)

Preamble

This manifesto is no eulogy of suicide, but of freedom rather.

Far be it from me to put forward a nihilistic philosophy upholding that life is nothing but suffering, and stupidly argue that life is not worth living and that the only option left is suicide.

We are well aware that life does bring joy to the one that is physically, psychologically and socially well-endowed and hereby likely to relish it.

However, we do argue that some extremely painful and excruciating situations justify resorting to suicide, and as a rule, that living or not living is a very personal choice.

Suicide ceased to be banned with the advent of the 1810 Napoleon Code.

However, there is no such thing as a right to suicide, which not only reveals a legal limbo on the matter, but also leaves those wishing to resort to suicide to their own devices.

We enjoy going to the cinema, but if one day, someone locked you up in a movie theatre, we sure would no longer enjoy watching a film at the cinema, and we would be reduced to begging to be let out. Likewise, being denied the right to use painless means to end our lives is tantamount to being locked up in life : it means not living deliberately but being forced to : it is a constrained choice.

By contrast, having those means at our disposal enables us to be human beings *willing to* live and die in keeping with our dignity, hereby refusing enslavement and too much suffering ; it enables us to free ourselves from our own fear of dying and thus allows us to enjoy life to the full. Life is sometimes a chance, but never a duty, therefore, why should suicide be either cowardly or guilty and even both ?

Last, in the face of a society praising profitability and by and large a dog-eat-dog world where entertainment in the pascalian sense of the term prevails, it is about time we reconsidered our perception of death in order to humanise the conditions of the dying.

These are the points that this manifesto proposes to expatiate on.

Chapter 1 : Fighting against the absurd so that living may become a deliberate choice

We do not choose to be born. In the beginning, life is no choice, it is enforced upon us. A man and a woman have sexual intercourse and inflict life upon us without our agreement : such is the commonplace scenario. Whether it is in vitro fertilization or other devices, this does not change the problem altogether : our personal agreement was not requested.

Likewise, we did not choose to grow up in such or such a country, in this or that family, in this or that social background, to be endowed with such or such genes, such or such gifts or such or such handicaps. How is it that I am not handsome, tall and genetically well-endowed like this one man ? Why was I not born into a rich family that bequeathed its wealth to me, hereby exempting me from working for a living ? These questions, which seem naive and are more often than not looked down upon as pointless moaning are nonetheless legitimate questionings yet unanswered. They bear witness to the fact that as soon as we are born, we fall prey to natural and social inequalities which have nothing to do with merit or worth.

Most of the time, when these inequalities are favourable to us (when we are born handsomer, wealthier and cleverer than the average man/woman), we thrive on those to boast some intrinsic superiority and to rule over others, as though such qualities stemmed from being rather than having, as though they were not a matter of chance but of personal merit. Although part of those inequalities may be put down to nurture, itself depending on willpower, denying the very

importance of nature and social conditioning, which we are not accountable for, is a telltale sign of bad faith.

As a matter of fact, and conversely, when those inequalities are detrimental to us (when we are born less handsome and less rich ... than the average man), we complain about our lot, we are well aware that we did not choose to be and look so : we bitterly acknowledge how arbitrary and unfair they are. Someone who is not quite attractive will suffer from not having any sex appeal, hence from not enjoying the very carnal pleasure which others do. Likewise, a poor person will be unable to enjoy the luxuries that his well-to-do counterparts do.

Quite ordinarily, we are reluctant to face the problem of natural and social inequalities we are arbitrarily confronted with. We usually say : « this is life, that's the way it is », and turn to something different in an effort to escape from such a bitter injustice. Philosophically speaking, such an attitude is tantamount to a moral and an intellectual kind of retreat, which is why we shall not consider it in this essay. We shall analyse the theoretical aspects of the question, then we shall go on to draw the matter-of-fact consequences linked to the right to suicide.

In philosophy, the aspects that have just been discussed are best illustrated by the concepts of contingency and the absurd. Contingency means that something might not have been or might have been altogether different, what is here without any providential or moral reason. The world might not have been or might have been different (for instance, it might have been better). We might not have been born at all or been born very different (handsomer ad wealthier). Our birth place and the year ad century when we were born, our body and our social background, all this pertains to contingency. Thus, nothing morally justifies our being born

and our being born the way we are, with our biological and social characteristics. To the questions « why are we here and why in such conditions ? », there is absolutely no answer.

What is absurd is what is devoid of meaning, that is, whatever is devoid of direction and purpose, that is what is aimless. This concept, linked to that of contingency, refers to life just as it is, just as it lies before us, with its succession of injustices and sufferings.

Life, as it is, is groundless and aimless, that is why it is devoid of meaning.

This assertion may sound pessimistic and nihilistic, and somewhat morbid ; it is actually the contrary.

To say that life is meaningful would then mean that whatever happens in the world is part and parcel of this general meaning.

My wife has died ? I have had a car crash ? I have killed someone ? If life is meaningful, then these events did not occur out of bad luck or a personal choice, but were bound to occur : such is the very logic of fate and providence.

In the same way, since by « life » we mean all human beings in the entire world, at all times, -if life has a purpose-, there is no such thing as evil then (everything is good, for everything has a meaning).

The Inquisition ? Nazism ? Isis ? Earthquakes ? If life makes sense at all, all these events then pertain to the general meaning of History : they were bound to happen, and no matter how bad they are, they are meant to lead to a far greater Good, that is, to an aim at which life drives.

Thus, the thesis whereby life is intrinsically meaningful is morally unsustainable. It is tantamount to justifying individual misfortunes and History's atrocities and justifying the unjustifiable.

I have cancer ? I deserved it ! The extermination of Jews in concentration camps ? They sure deserved it too ! The use of such disgraceful irony throws light upon the fact that asserting that life is meaningful, that whatever happens was bound to happen, that there is no sense of the absurd, is nothing but intellectual fraud and leads us to accept what morally ought not to be accepted.

By contrast, to say that life is absurd means admitting that there are biological -genetic diseases, cancer…) and social (poverty, dictatorial regimes) data that are morally unjustifiable and that should not be. This is no pessimism or nihilism, quite the contrary : it is because life is absurd that it is urgent that we should make it meaningful by first fighting injustices. If life were meaningful, we should then lock ourselves up in *quietism* and just take the world as it is ; on the contrary, the philosophy of the absurd proposes that we should not take it as it is but change it since nothing justifies it.

Let us bear in mind Lewis Carroll's thought-provoking statement in *Alice in Wonderland :* « if life be meaningless, what is it that prevents us from making it meaningful ? ».

If life were meaningful, it would follow that we are not free but submitted to that meaning. On the contrary, if life is absurd, it is we that make up the meaning : we are the authors of our lives.

The absurd is the condition for our freedom. Life is absurd, therefore it belongs to us : we choose the meaning we

endow it with.

The paramount philosophical question, as L.Carroll sees it, therefore consists in our identifying the obstacles that keep us from making up a meaning for our lives so that we may fight them.

The first and foremost obstacle that lies before us is having to live biologically and socially-bound without our having decided to. Some avoid grappling with the question answering that they can always choose to commit suicide if they do not wish to live (any longer). That is true, and that is as true as a slave deciding to disobey his master or a citizen deciding to disobey the rules of the country he lives in.

However, such a rebellious decision generally entails painful consequences : the rebellious slave will be beaten and made homeless, as for the rebellious citizen, he will be fined and and sent to jail. In other words, despite having the opportunity to disobey, one is bound to admit that the slave has no other real alternative but to obey his master and the citizen no other alternative but to obey the rules of the society he lives in. Free will does not rule out constraint.

In the same way, we cannot decide to die of our own free will the same way we decide to raise our arm or close our eyes. Our body is biologically set for living and not for dying, thus, death, except for suicide, always occurs accidentally, which always makes it a very painful experience (cancer, intoxication, organ deterioration…).

If I want to die *hic et nunc* but do not have the sophisticated means to die peacefully, my body will struggle to keep me alive hereby condemning me to excruciating suffering : that is what is called agony. This term comes from the Greek agôn which means fight, that is fight for life : if my body did

not fight to stay alive when it is dying, dying would not be a painful experience but would be as easy a process as digesting. I am therefore biologically bound to live. If the body were in full agreement with the mind when I rationally make up my mind to die, suicide would be an easy task and therefore would dispense with external means to make it a painless death.

This biological constraint is present without our being able to alter it, at least until the first transhuman is created, a topic we shall not consider in this essay, without nonetheless denying that transhumanism would enable us to fight natural inequalities and shake off the yoke of numberless biological constraints. As long as we dwell in « natural » bodies, we are biologically set to survive the way we do now.

However, this biological constraint, considering where science now stands, could easily be come to terms with, were it not doubled with a social constraint.

As a matter of fact, some devices allowing a somewhat painless death have indeed been worked out, which legally frees us from the body being made to live on, still, such devices are not within everyone's reach, which betrays an implicit social ban on painless suicide.

As Plato wrote in *Phaedo,* « the body is the jail of the soul ». The soul cannot spontaneously free itself from the body without suffering. The death-related devices above mentioned would allow us to fling open the doors of the jail so that we might no longer live out of biological constraint (but out of a personal decision since we could die painlessly when we want it), but society keeps us from doing so by making such methods inaccessible (or hardly accessible). For instance, the devices, set out as they are in Philip

Nitschke's The Peaceful Pill handbook (Pilule Douce en français), would make a peaceful death within everyone's reach, were they socially implemented. The person in pain, instead of preparing for his/her suicide by him/herself in the dark, afraid of both laws and miscarriage, could in the open and shamelessly get hold of the devices/means he/she needs to depart peacefully.

The true problem at stake is therefore social. It is because society bars us from accessing those painless devices and leaves those suffering to their own devices desperately looking for a termination of some kind, that life is a constraint.

A social constraint then : « thou shalt live for thy family, for thy society, for thy country .../... Thy life is not thine ». We shall fathom out the religious roots of this absurd ban in chapter 4. But we can quote Shopenhauer at this stage, in *Parerga and Paralipomena* , « Ethics, Law and Politics », which sheds light on te fact that condemning someone to live when they do not wish to is inacceptable. « Requiring that a man who refuses to live any longer, should live on like a mere machine for others' usefulness, is an odd demand indeed ».

As a matter of fact, on what moral principle could we condemn someone to live ? To consider that someone should serve their family or their society although they do not want to live any longer and are in great pain, it is philosophically speaking, reifying them, i e, reducing them to an object. To quote kant, it is tantamount to regarding man as a means rather than as an end.

It means looking upon man as a cog in the social machine hereby denying him his intrinsic dignity. It would mean that man is dignity-free as a human being, but entitled to one for

his social usefulness (work, social rank...). To put it differently, man would be entitled to a mere external dignity which disappeared as soon as he ceased to be useful to society.

Consequently, if we regard man as an end rather than as a means, we cannot demand that he live to serve an external purpose of some kind if he does not wish to live any longer.

The right to suicide is a direct consequence of the Rights of Man. If man's dignity, if one is to believe the Declaration of the Rights of man, does not depend on his/her social belonging, but is inherent in his humanity, it is then immoral to oblige someone wanting to die, to be socially useful. To fully grasp the latter point, it is necessary to correct a language mistake that pro-choicers, -such as *Exit*- commonly make (pro-choicers whose general philosophy we however share).

The latter often use the phrase « to die in dignity », which, however, could mean that one can lose one's dignity if one dies in atrocious suffering, which betrays some absurd reasoning. The adequate phrase, if one wishes to be philosophically accurate, therefore is : « to die in accordance with one's dignity ». Let us hammer the point home : as human beings, we have an intrinsic dignity which depends on neither biological nor social factors : we shall therefore not lose any dignity. However, some situations of great physical or mental suffering do not agree with our sense of dignity and are morally intolerable precisely because we are beings endowed with a sense of dignity. We may agree to a table being « tortured », as it is devoid of consciousness and is therefore dignity-free. Yet, a human being Shall not be tortured presicely because he is endowed with a sense of dignity.

Thus, when a man is in constant pain (psychologically and/or physically) and when he no longer wishes to live, his sense of dignity morally requires a right to a painless termination.

To want him to suffer for his family or his society is to reify him as well as flout his sense of dignity ; it is condemning him to too much suffering that is incompatible with his sense of dignity. How can one then claim that one lives in the country of the Rights of Man until a right to suicide is implemented and socially organised ?

Living out of social constraint prevents one from living of one's own free will, whether or not one enjoys life. These days, someone who wishes lo live is socially obliged to live. The difference between living of one's own free will (which requires that one is not socially bound to do so) and living out of social constraint is the same as the difference between a love story and a rape.

In the former, will is paramount, in the latter, coercion is.

But if the rape victim nonetheless derived some pleasure from that experience (this may sound like sick humour, but it is meant to serve the purpose of our demonstration), if she/he was forced to have sexual intercourse, this is nothing but rape, and this is morally condemnable.

Likewise, even though human beings that are socially constrained to live do derive some pleasure from living, life remains a constraint : they are reified and their sense of dignity is flouted. Besides, if they are suddenly taken ill (incurably ill) or poverty-stricken, they have no means to peacefully terminate their lives.

The right to painless suicide allows but one thing : to be a willing human being.

To no longer live socially and biologically constrained (which amounts to being raped by the real/reality), because one chooses it. To live of one's own free will, leaving one's fear of suffering behind when committing suicide (on account of being constantly threatened to be « biologically chastised » for having wanted to depart from life). *To live because one has decided to do so rather than out of fear of the consequences our suicide would entail (to do something because one fears the consequences if one fails to do it means doing it out of constraint. To live out of fear of dying is to live out of constraint).*

This right alone may outweigh the contingency of our birth. We did not choose to be born and to be born under these or those circumstances ; the natural arbitrariness is unavoidable ; however for this contingency not to become an existential rape, the right to painless suicide is a moral necessity. Since we did not choose to be born, we ought to be granted the opportunity to die easily and peacefully.

If life is by essence absurd (since we did not choose to be « thrown into the world » or in such or such conditions even though we deem those conditions satisfactory), we can nonetheless make it meaningful ; and yet, a life lived against one's own free will cannot have a meaning which agrees with our human dignity. Consequently, the right to painless suicide, which alone enables us to live of one's own free will, is the sine qua non condition to make life meaningful despite the absurd.

It is not a question of denying the existential absurd, but rather of refraining from making it worse by adding a social sense of the absurd to it.

Human beings cannot choose to be born, but they can be allowed to choose the way they wish to die, that is, decide

peacefully whether they wish to go on living or not. This opportunity of dying peacefully, far from encouraging suicide, dispels the fear of suffering and prompts one into living.

Chapter 2 : The opportunity of painless suicide : prompting one to live

To fully grasp the purpose of this manifesto for a right to painless suicide, it is important that one should understand an idea which always seems paradoxical at first sight, i e, knowing one can terminate one's life painlessly of one's own free will is a great source of comfort as well as a plea for living. Conversely, being denied this opportunity may lead one to feel locked up in one's life, may lead one to uncontrollable fears and to a passionate suicide. Therefore our manifesto is no struggle for dying, but for living.

Banning dying makes one feel like dying, jut as locking one up in a room is making one feel like getting out of it. Conversely, allowing painless suicide is instilling serenity as well as a love of living in someone.

Writer Cioran found a subtle way of expressing this idea ; his statement is stunning : « without the dea of suicide, I surely would have killed myself ».

Suicide appears as a way out of the sufferings that are unavoidable. But if that way out itself is painful, it is then impossible -whether one dies or stays alive- for one not to be in pain. Without the opportunity of a painless termination, one can always resign oneself to what Spencer wisely writes

in the following verse -Fairy Queen Book, Canto 9- as quoted by Mary Shelley in *Mathilda* :

« Never mind this slight pain which at you waves

Which makes the frail body fear the bitter wave

A short pain wisely borne

A short pain wisely borne

Shall lead you to that long sleep

Where in a tomb your soul rests in peace. »

A short pain wisely borne, and here is eternal sleep. This stoic forbearance in the face of suffering is somewhat heroic, but it is immoral to enforce it upon someone when one can avoid it. These days, those in physical and mental pain are going through this painful and desperate meditation although we do have the necessary means to alleviate their suffering and allow them to peacefully terminate their lives. Leaving those people going through excruciating pains is downright barbaric.

We can therefore add « painless » to Cioran's quote : « Without the idea of a *painless* suicide, I surely would have killed myself. »

As a matter of fact, a painful suicide does not enable one not to suffer any longer as it leaves an undetermined period of time before one, which prevents one from achieving peacefulness before dying. Not having the opportunity to end one's life painlessly when one is ready for it may drive one crazy, and paradoxically enough, may give one suicidal tendencies (precisely because one has no control over the matter). Once again, Cioran, describes it quite precisely

when he speaks of the feeling that « one is stuck down here », a feeling that is justified when one lives under both biological and social constraints, as one is denied the right to a peaceful end.

A case in point is the forum called *Sanctioned Suicide* on the Internet, where many people in pain are in quest of means to end their lives painlessly. Those people feel terrified as they dread not being able to handle the process properly, i e, miss the process or end up severely damaged by doing so. They feel they are stuck in a life, in a society which does not regard them as human beings but as machines that must be kept working (which supposes, quite implicitly, that suicide be banned). They are afraid of others, laws and frauds. This constant anxiety-laden atmosphere cannot but lead them to crave death. Besides, some having missed their suicide end up in a vegetative state till they die and find themselves unable to try again.

Others, on this very forum, state that they have found the means to reach their aim, after strenuous efforts that are not always legal, as well as various undertakings : so they say since they can turn their attention to other things then. All these situations point to one fact : preventing people from ending their lives painlessly is not the solution to allow them to live longer and happily : quite the contrary. When the suffering surpasses the fear of agony, i e, when living is more off-putting than dying, then suicide will occur. The latter will be painless if society is compassionate enough or if the person has managed to get hold of the necessary means ; otherwise, it is bound to be painful.

We human beings are mortal. This truth, stated as it is, sounds so commonplace and self-evident… And yet, it does not find an echo on the social scale. Death is not an event that society prepares itself for, which implies that when an

incurable disease crops up in someone's life, the latter finds her/himself helpless and doomed to live through long sufferings before dying (induced by the disease itself or better, thanks to no therapeutic fury, but not thanks to a well-planned and monitored suicide).

As death strikes sooner or later, it is urgent that one anticipate it in order to spare one the unnecessary sufferings that it may imply if nothing is done.

However, since death is a serious and dreary topic that society wishes to spare us the trouble of bringing up, we do indeed decide not to bring it up. We somehow let things be, hoping that death will seize us while we sleep preferably when we are old enough for that ! But as Spinoza claims, « there is no hope without fear ». Hoping to live painlessly means fearing the contrary. We are all these days haunted by the fear of dying painfully, although that fear is often latent and half confessed. In a word, the question of our dying is far from settled. In the face of this vacuum, there lie more or less three solutions :

1- To abstain from thinking about it and bury our heads in the sand (the most common option).

2- To think about it and resign oneself to the social context as it is and make do with the fear of a painful death.

3- To think about it and draw the necessary conclusions by anticipating one's death and getting hold of the necessary means in order to die painlessly : such is the option we advocate.

Adorno and Horkheimer, two philosophers from the Frankfurt School, make a conceptual distinction which is helpful for us to consider the question. They distinguish the « objective reason », which sets the objectives, that is, the

aims to be reached, from the « instrumental reason », that is a method which ponders the ways and means to reach such or such aims. As regards death, we are all deep in the « objective reason » while forgetting the « instrumental reason » : we admit, provided we are not religious or sadistic, that one must allow the dying to die peacefully, but we do not implement the means to reach this aim. Without the instrumental reason, the objective reason is pointless.

To assume death socially should then point towards organising suicide socially . As philosopher Comte-Sponville writes in his *Dictionnaire philosophique,* « to commit suicide does not mean choosing death (as one shall die), but the time for dying ». To claim that those who advocate the right to suicide support death is therefore absurd : one does not choose to live or to die, one chooses to commit suicide or to let oneself die (but one dies in both cases). What matters about the right to painless suicide is only to be able to die when life is reduced to suffering. Escaping one's fear of dying by leaving the issue unresolved is no solution for our fear does remain.

By contrast, tackling the issue and getting hold of the necessary means is the key to freeing oneself from the fear of dying and to living more intensively for indeed what a shame it is to let life be altogether spoilt by that fear... Unless painless suicide is implemented, the fear of dying will always spoil the celebration of living.

To those claiming stupidly that thinking about suicide is morbid, we shall answer that it is quite the contrary ! What is indeed morbid is not preparing oneself for a peaceful death and letting oneself fall prey to infinite sufferings. Illusion is more distressing than lucidity for it leaves the issues just as they are, hereby giving rise to numerous problems. To seek refuge in illusion cannot but lead one to

distress and pain. To quote René Char, lucidity is « the hurt that is the closest to the sun ».

Let us now expose the confusion that many philosophers make between death and dying. Death refers to that stage which comes after life and what is left of us, i e a corpse. Then, unless one gives in to religious speculations or superstition, death can be defined as a void. Let us quote Epicurus in his Letter to Menoeceus : « … Death is nothing to us for all good and evil lie in sensation, and death is the absence of sensitivity. It would indeed be a pointless and objectless fear that fear which would be the fruit of one's awaiting something which causes no trouble pertaining to its nature. Therefore, the woe that is the most awe-inspiring to us is nothing to us for while we are, it is not, and when it (death) arises, we are no more. Therefore, death exists neither for the living nor for the dead, for it has nothing to do with the former, and as for the latter, they are no more. »

It may be objected that nothingness is a source of great distress owing to it being beyond representation and to the knowledge that there is nothing awaiting us, which is a source of existential distress : granted, still, this source of distress exists only for those living ; dead men tell no tales ! Epicurus' reasoning therefore suffers no objection. Some think they have a point though : the death of others does affect us, which is indeed true, but the philosopher only speaks of our own death. The death of others is not death but the absence of them. However, considering the point of view of those who are no more, death is nothing. The living suffer from the death of their dear ones, but the deceased are not in pain any longer.

In a word, death, strictly speaking, is not a social problem for only a living person can suffer and be likely to be helped socially. The death of others, i e their absence, may be

tackled by mourning (which is not the issue at stake) and our own death is to be tackled philosophically. Since we shall never experience our own death, a source of distress and anxiety related to death would have no rational foundations, as Merleau-Ponty shows in *Sens et Non-Sens* : « In actual fact, we cannot but think of nothingness against a backdrop of being (or against a backdrop of world, to quote Sartre). Any discourse on death claiming to convince us is untrustworthy since it subrreptitiously uses our consciousness of being (...) There is therefore in the consciousness of death enough to go beyond it. »

Only a living person may think about death and worry about it : death itself is no problem since it will never make us suffer. Understanding that, in Epicurus' wake, should enable us to live happily.

This analysis points to another linguistic oddity that pro-choice leaders make when they claim that all should be entitled to a « peaceful death ». Death being nothing, it cannot be painful. What is therefore to be made accessible to us is a peaceful dying. Dying is the passage between life and death, that is, the moment when one dies. Then, those who die (the dying) are living, therefore, they may suffer. If dying be a problem, it is because it is a problem affecting the living.

Paradoxical as it may seem, dying absolutely has nothing to do with death : the former is an experience for the living while the latter is a dream and resurrection-free sleep. Let this appraisal not be deemed pessimistic. Quite the contrary : being acutely aware of our being mortal and finite must lead us to enjoy life to the full. As Comte-Sponville writes, if there is no life after death, « there is a life before death », and it would be a shame, he adds, not to savour it. In a nutshell, dying is the concern of the living and not of

the dead. Likewise, the phrase « at the end of one's life » is inaccurate and humiliating for the aged who may be in great pain. For life has no degrees : one is either alive or dead (one cannot be half living, this is just absurd) : there is no in-between. The aged that may be in great pain are not at the end of their lives : they are living (for as long as they live, they are fully alive) ; they are no less living beings than the younger ones, they do not live on a lower scale, which would then make their living less worthy : they are beings with a consciousness, and as such, as fully alive and worthy as their brothers and sisters in humanity).

To be « at the end of one's life » would then mean being a living dead, which is a logical contradiction : either one is living or one is dead. Thus, to speak of someone as being at the end of their life is tantamount to speaking of a square circle !

If we leave metaphysical anxiety aside, which, as we have seen, can be tackled through philosophy, we are bound to note that many people are not afraid of death but of dying, that is, of suffering when they die. Death is nothing compared to dying : it is therefore a major social problem.

The dying and all those who want to terminate their lives need to be helped socially, that is by being given ways and means legally. The dead do not need any help unlike the former.

The confusion between dying and death is deliberately made by religions in order to nourrish the fear of the Hereafter, and this fear is a way of ruling over people's minds. Someone living in fear is unlikely to rebel. Fear makes one weak, timid, controllable and submissive. It prevents one from being bold enough to disobey the unfair laws that are enforced upon one. The fearful slave obeys his

master even if the latter orders him to send his brothers in humanity to gas chambers. Thus, instilling the fear of death in the people's mind is a sure way to keep it under one's yoke and deter it from rebelling.

But when the people does not believe in Hell (which is similar to an atrocious Hereafter more dreaded in the Middle-Ages than today), the best way to present death as an awful experience is to liken it to agony. Even though one no longer dreads Hell, being slightly afraid of death is enough for one to feel paralysed and revolt-free. When some paranormal fear grasps me by disclosing the terrible truth of life hereby stunning me with the dazzling truth, quite a recurrent topic in catholic literature (Bloy, Bernanos), I am just incapable of having a critical mind, of questioning the prejudices of my epoch and of fighting society's absurd. From religious learders' point of view, it is important that they maintain this blood-curdling vision of death so that the people should remain in shackles.

However, if one takes a minute, rational look at that conception of death, one realises that it is rather dying that death. If dying is quite commonly painful, it is so for biological reasons : the body is set to live, and it therefore struggles for life till the end, hence agony. There is a conflict between the body struggling for its survival and external causes which attack that body : it is this very conflict which begets agony. Even in the case of ageing-related death, it is again the body which is too weak to defend itself against constant external aggressions ; it fades away until it dies. The fact that old age and ageing is painful does show that the body fights till the end even when it suffers martyrdom.

In a nutshell, agony can be accounted for by biological reasons that, let us put it bluntly, are stupid : if Nature were a conscious being, one might blame it for being stupid for

having failed to foresee a peaceful dying for the living. If God existed, he would be perverse for having created creatures that are set to live and doomed to die (a combination making painless dying and agony difficult). But if one parts with all those religious fictions to come back to reality, one fully understands then that agony, which is purely biological and contingent, has no truth whatsoever to reveal. In other words, those pains are pointless as they are not meant to teach one anything (except for a perverted mind that might relish someone's agony, but such is not a point at issue). Agony is no mystic experience likely to shed spiritual light on my life and which, as such, ought to be lived ; it is but a biological moment, absurd and altogether unfit for my human dignity. That is why it is important that it be bypassed by painless ways of dying. To be able to dispense someone with such sufferings and to refuse to do so is downright barbaric.

Now that we have drawn a line between death and dying, we can go straight to the core of chapter 2. Being afraid of dying painfully may lead one to suicide and this fear may keep one in a state of permanent anxiety which is prone to morbid thinking, but it may just as well lead one to stop postponing the prospect of a painless termination and act it out hereby not fearing it any longer. To plunge head first in the worst so as to stop fearing it. If agony cannot be avoided, then it is best to experience it right away (and plunge in eternal sleep) rather than experience constant fear while waiting for it. What is the point of prolonging a life made of terror and trying to run away from it ?

In his *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire (the musings of a lonely wanderer),* Rousseau writes *:* « I deliberately bear the woes I suffer hic and nunc rather than those I fear ». For indeed, there is more to dread from a woe that might or might not come than from a present one. The woe to come

is made worse by the power of the imagination, but the present woes can be tolerated and borne (courage is at stake here), but we have no grip on those lying ahead. In this respect, if agony is inevitable, it is best to experience it now, to confront it and live it through rather than dread it until it comes. It is therefore quite understandable that fear of death should lead to passionate suicide (which often occurs).

To say that one fights suicide by making it more accessible and painless is on no acount contradictory. All terminations induced by the fear of dying might be avoided by granting one the right to painless suicide. If painless dying is guaranteed, it should not be feared any longer. To access peaceful ways and means of dying means not having to bear agony because one fears death. If indeed dying occurs painlessly and it means sinking into eternal sleep, dying ceases to be dreadful then.

To sum up, the fear of dying is the cause of numberless suicides. If one grants people the right to peaceful, painless termination, one wards off this fear as well as fear-induced terminations. The propect of a painless death therefore is a case for « sucking the marrow » ; to quote Montaigne in his *Essais,* « the one that has learnt to die has ceased to be submissive ». if one is no longer afraid either of death because one has understood that it is nothing, or dying thanks to the means put at one's disposal, then one shall be able, without it being any act of heroism, to escape torture and/or enslavement. One shall be able to say NO to reality when it becomes unbearable for biological reasons (diseases) or social reasons (dire poverty, dehumanising working conditions..). Freed from the fear of religious representations of death and agony, one's life is bound to be more peaceful, more intense and daring.

Chapter 3 : To live and to die in accordance with one's dignity : refusing too much suffering

Dignity is someone's fundamental value. Fundamental indeed for it does not depend on such or such biological or social characteristics, but because it forms an inseparable unity. To be endowed with consciousness -self and world-consciousness- is being endowed with dignity, whether one is black or white, tall or small, rich or poor. Nothing can take our dignity away from us.

To better understand this concept, one has to consider its evolution through History. From the Antiquity to the XVIII th Century, there prevailed an aritocratic vision of the world (from the Greek aristoï, i e the best) whereby there exist degrees of humanity : we are not equal in dignity, but there are some men that are more or less human, some being more god-like than others that are more beast-like ; the best, the average and the bad ones. Myths are but the representation of this aristocratic ideology ; just as there is an ontological hierarchy among gods, there is also one among human beings. In the Middle-Ages, for instance, it was normal not to treat a slave, a nobleman and a clergyman equally. Not all men deserved the same kind of respect. Even though philosophers like Seneca endeavoured to refute *aristocratism,* showing that a slave is no less a human being than his master, this hierarchical vision of humanity lived on for centuries long and is still living on. However, in the XVIII th Century the French Revolution and the Rights of Man politically abolished -at least in theory- the aristocratic ideology, proclaiming the universal dignity of man. What makes up our dignity is neither our blood nor our rank in society, but our consciousness. As human witnesses

to ourselves and the world, we do deserve respect. A mentally retarded person has as much dignity as an engineer, a vagrant, a billionaire, an African, an Asian, a dustman...and so on, for they are all conscious beings. Consciousness is the only one element that cannot be separated from a human being : you may deprive a genius of his talent, a billionaire of his fortune... but you will never be able to deprive them of their consciousness, not least because it has nothing to do with having (unlike all the other characteristics above mentioned), but with being.

As a matter of fact, depriving someone of their consciousness would be tantamount to killing them, i e, annihilating their being.

Democracy rests upon a sacred principle : the equal dignity of all human beings, regardless of fortune, skin colour, social position and so on.

You may hit a stone or a table without hurting anyone's feelings, but if you do a human being, you will hurt his/her feelings precisely because he/she is a creature endowed with consciousness whose dignity is flouted.

Social rights, one might go as far as to say, are but the extension of the Rights of Man : the latter are the theory and the former are the practice. If both notions agree, why should one be made to work fifteen hours a day in horrendous conditions for a pittance ? Let us go further : if my dignity be inherent in my being, if it does not depend on my social status, I therefore ought to be allowed to enjoy a decent living even if I do not work : hence the moral plea for a universal income. The rights of man and forced labour are just incompatible. If my existence is to be socially justified, it means that I am denied the dignity I ought to be granted as

a conscious being ; it means I am given the dignity corresponding to the social part that I play.

From a practical point of view, it stands to reason that the dignity granted to human beings varies according to the social part they play : « you shall live well only if you serve society decently », in other words, « your life will not be respected unless you work ; you will never be respected for who you are as a human being ». This social order is downright disgraceful as it runs counter to the spirit of the Enlightenment. Abiding by this set of values is tantamount to reifying man : « be useful to society or live in poverty » : such is the implicit way of the world we live in…

To such arguments, some who boast a form of pragmatism will answer that it is just economically impossible to adopt a universal income as work is the only potential source of wealth. Although this argument is highly debatable, let us take it for granted to go on with our demonstration.

If society is unable to provide its members an honourable life, it then ought to allow them to refuse a life that does not agree with their sense of honour and dignity, that is, grant them the right to a painless death.

Even if work were the sole source of wealth, it would nonetheless be immoral to condemn someone to forced labour or dire poverty for such situations run counter to the notion of human dignity.

Therefore, if one cannot set someone free from forced labour or dire poverty, one then has the moral duty to give them the means to painlessly escape from that situation. Unable as we are to free them from the social constraint that strangles them, one must give them the key to a painless death, for indeed, let us remember that inasmuch as I may

end my life painlessly, I am no longer prey to those social constraints that bind me through forced labour or dire poverty and despite those, I am made free by this painless death option. Let us say NO to social rape !

To dispel some popular sophistry, the prospect of a universal income does not mean that work is our enemy ; forced labour however is. The universal income might enable one to work deliberately, of one's own free will, rather than be forced to ; that would make work more productive (one is more efficient when working out of pleasure). Working under constraint, like it or not, is nothing but enslavement ; working of one's own free will means expressing one's freedom. In a word, a universal income coupled with the right to a painless death are but the two faces of the same coin named « civilisation ».

Socrates, as Plato tells in his *Apology,* preferred to drink the hemlock rather than be forced to live through situations which disagree with dignity (imprisonment, exile). For stoicism, suicide was deemed as a sensible way out when life becomes too painful, hostile and humiliating. To kill oneself was then construed as a wise act. *Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare shows that it was customary among Romans to kill themselves when they had lost the fight and thought life worthless : it was no sign of cowardice but of courage.

As Philip Nitschke explains in *The Peaceful Pill,* the Army often provided its soldiers and spies with hemlock capsules so that they might commit suicide rather than speak under torture : better die rapidly than be tortured.

Such was the case of Jacques Bingen, a prominent member of the France Libre sent by General de Gaulle to the French resistants in France. He was arrested by the Nazis on May

12th 1944 -he was 36-. He swallowed his hemlock capsule rather than be submitted to torture.

How well this war hero illustrates Montaigne's « whoever has learnt to die has learnt not to be a servant ». By doing so, he abode by his ideal and died a resistant. Could he have refrained from ratting on his comrades under torture ? Who knows ? Thanks to his hemlock capsule, he remained socially free till the end, although according to Nitschke, swallowing hemlock is not the most peaceful way of dying.

The story of Bingen may be held up as an allegory of human condition.

Even though we are no soldiers under the Occupation, we, as human beings, constantly run the risk of being captured by the equivalent of Nazis : excruciating, incurable diseases such as cancer. It would therefore be legitimate that we have our hemlock capsule close at hand…

We are all soldiers on duty on some hostile land, falling prey to enemies such as accidents, natural disasters, perversity ; as such, a hemlock capsule may come in handy in case we should be captured by some intolerable suffering.

Some will argue that how to die should not be an untimely matter, and that what counts for the time being is that we should live happily : how wrong !

The problem is that when we are assailed by disease and suffering, we do not have enough energy and will to consider suicide, for to get hold of what is necessary requires both patience and insight. Had Bingen waited till he was arrested by the Nazis to get hold of his capsule, he would have endured torture. The same goes for us when disease strikes.

To quote Cioran in *Aveux et Anathèmes,* « there is no arguing with physical pain ». Such is a plea for anticipation. It is that very anticipation which will instil a feeling of freedom in us. Knowing that one can enjoy a painless death may make you feel like struggling for life till the end.

It is now time we answered a well-known objection of Pro-Life supporters who claim that the suicide rate is bound to soar up if such methods are made so easily available especially to those who may feel depressed and decide to end their lives instead of waiting till things pick up. That is a distorted way of thinking ! For one thing, these days, some people commit suicide for « bad » reasons. Banning painless suicide does not settle the matter.

Secondly, all those who commit suicide should be allowed to choose a painless death which agrees with their human dignity no matter if the reason why they killed themselves was « bad ».

Last, who can claim that someone killed themselves for bad reasons ?

There is no knowing what someone feels deep inside.

Mental suffering is often invisible and unbearable, for all psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists' efforts to help. That suffering may have no other way out than suicide. How could we assess whether someone committed suicide for a good or a bad reason !?

Moreover, we do think that being allowed to access painless dying methods would bring the number of suicide cases down. Indeed, a great number of suicide cases are due to people's fear of death and because the opportunity of a painless death is an invitation to relish life (as we have seen before). Besides, those who end their lives for so-called

« bad » reasons (let us keep that awkward term for the time being), do so because they do not get enough attention and care. Being depressive and suicidal does not agree with today's capitalist mantra : being depressed and suicidal is deemed cowardly and gloomy. You are bound to be stigmatised and ostracized, which is the perfect condition for committing suicide...

If those people deep in mental suffering were cared for and if their wanting to die peacefully were taken into account instead of being deemed crazy, they would feel respected and their death wish might recede... On the contrary, if one sticks to psychobabble to handle them, they are bound to feel rejected and considered as cases. Hence suicide is but a way to kill the wretched refuse that they were made into. However, if one reads the great writers, one may realise that melancholy is often a symptom of those geniuses (as Aristotle states) who would be better off being allowed to give lectures than being locked up in mental homes.

Being fed at the Prytaneum rather than being led to drink the hemlock (Socrates demanded he be fed at the Prytaneum for lifting up his fellow-citizens' mind and spirit rather than be sentenced to death).

Whether we are labelled neurotic, psychotic, bipolar... we all deserve to be treated with the same sense of dignity. No psychological definition of an individual ought to determine how much respect we owe them.

Let us bear in mind the democratic definition of freedom as stated in article 4 in the Declaration of the Rights of Man : « liberty consists in doing whatever does not infringe on others' liberty ».

The one that ends his life does not infringe on others' freedom ; his life is his and no-one else's. Denying him this right is flouting that fundamental right of his. Conversely, granting them this right means honouring their dignity, their freedom and prompting them to live. Writer Dominique Eddé, in his article « Humanising Death » very well sums up why one must listen to those suffering, take their ideas seriously and grant them their wish to end their lives painlessly. « Provided we are sure that we have access to the right means to die peacefully, we will stop thinking about it that much. Hopelessness is best disarmed and undermined by the feeling that one is listened to. Knowing that you can die peacefully makes you feel like living to the full. »

Besides, nothing is worse than the dictatorship of Happiness : « be happy » : this is a duty ! More than a duty, a norm (« normal people are happy ») : this is tantamount to discarding the poor wretch as an abnormal being (if happiness be the norm, unhappiness is abnormal and guilty). To quote from Kant, happiness is « an ideal pertaining to the imagination and not to reason » : one does not know what makes one be happy : one cannot but imagine it. Perhaps, as Kant suggests, happiness as we dream of it is unattainable. The duty to be happy without knowing what makes us happy is therefore a duty that cannot be carried out and is a source of disappointment at that. It is best to give up on that duty. This saves you the trouble of feeling frustrated and stigmatising the unhappy ones. To be happy, let us open up to the present.

Let us grant ourselves the right to refuse any excess of suffering that might descend upon us, so that our lives might agree with our sense of dignity.

Death, as we have seen, is nothing ; here again, Cioran in *Précis de Décomposition :* « life is more awe-inspiring than

death : it is death which is the very unknown thing ». Indeed, it is only in life that we suffer. Death is an absence of suffering. Therefore, death can legitimately become a reassuring and comforting prospect when life is hard, even if we do not intend to commit suicide. Knowing, when we are suffering, that death is at hand (and that we are able to escape our suffering) helps to support life. Or to quote Nietzsche : « thinking about suicide is a great source of comfort ; it helps you spend more than one bad night » *(Par delà le bien et le mal).* Those dubbed the melancholics, i e M.Shelley, Baudelaire and Cioran all agree on death : as they show it quite well in their respective writings, death is not to be feared for it is the end of suffering, eternal sleep, supreme liberation.

The idea of death, far from being morbid, is a source of fresh air thanks to which the mind may breathe when life has become unbreathable. Let us therefore not spoil that source by banning painless suicid*e.*

Who but Baudelaire in his poem *The Death of the Poor* exemplies this idea better than anyone else ?

Even if one leaves the religious poetics aside, one notes that the prospect of death is both comforting and stimulating. Death, in this letter, as in Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus,* pertains to a lack of suffering and pain.

This poem is no plea for suicide but for life. It « gives us the courage to march until evening. » Without that idea, the poor would be deprived of comfort and would fall under the burden of their social distress. It is therefore morally indispensable to implement painless ways to die for everyone so as to make this elixir better and likely to weather the crisis when it crops up, hereby fighting « the storm, the snow and the hoar-frost ».

Conversely, if one continues to socially disregard those in pain and deny them the right to a painless end, let us then expect suicide to soar as well as depression and intolerable agony. We are human beings endowed with dignity and must be treated as such when it comes to suffering and dying.

Chapter 4 : Against the sophistry of Fundamentalism

Any religious pro-life ideology is a fundamentalist ideology because it holds an absurd stance from a philosophical and moral point of view : our life is not ours but God's ; it is a gift from God, therefore, we cannot just tamper with it. We are more or less like a pen which its owner uses for writing. Likewise, we are to obey God our creator. We have been ascribed a function by our owner. If a pen is worthy, its worth is not intrinsec but extrinsec. Likewise, if we have any worth at all, it is not as human beings but because we belong to God. As human beings, we are nothing but poor sinners devoid of dignity. It is only because we are God's creatures that we are endowed with dignity.

Since we do not own our lives, we ought not to decide to die : only God may take away what he bestowed upon us. : we are submitted to God's will and must therefore obey him and put up with whatever ordeal we are to go through, otherwise, we shall have to atone for disobeying (go to Hell). Committing suicide means shrinking from suffering till the end, that is, disobeying God. It means robbing God of his privilege, which is sinful. It amounts to becoming God's foe. Whatever suffering we may endure, we must live our utmost in order not to arouse God's wrath. God is love, but « spare the rod and spoil the child », as the old saying goes ! Then, God submits us to torture out of love, even as we endure

agony ; let us therefore honour this as a gift since our Father is caring. Suffering makes you grow, purifies you and saves you : it is a gift from God so that we may deserve a place in Heaven. It is through suffering that the Truth will shine through. To shun suffering is to shun the truth... etc. We might as well carry on with this endless list.

The Bible, as we already know, proclaims God's will through the twelve Apostles. What is written in the Bible is not to be discussed, whether one wants it or not. There is nothng to understand about it : just believe and obey ! « Thou shalt not kill » : this applies to both others and one-self, and this applies to both the fœtus and the bed-ridden old person, hence the religious ban on abortion and euthanasia. Thus, what at first sight appears as a sensible commandment actually turns out to be perverted and unfair. If one sticks to this commandment, one keeps a raped woman from aborting as she does not want to keep the fruit of a crime, and one keeps an old person suffering an incurable disease, vomiting his excrements from putting an end to his life for « thou shalt not kill »...

Claiming that life is not ours is dismissing contingency : reason has no say in the matter : I am here because of God and my life belongs to him. If one agrees with this, it is then logical to consider that starving children, victims of paedophiles, children born orphans and penniless are the result of God's will. If God does indeed rule the world, it is logical that he want everything that happens, evil included. Dismissing contingency means justifying everything by ascribing it to God's will, it means that what is evil (Nazism, starvation, cancer) is a necessary evil for it is part of God's plan within the world he created. If I am evil, I am so by choice, by my own perversity, but the evil I do will be reintegrated into the world order by God, that is, transformed into Good (the same goes for the evil carried

out by Satan which is meant to chastise us for our sins). In other words, Hitler's and Stalin's evil and their perpetrators were reintegrated into the world order by God. If one gives further historic examples, one may grasp the perversity of religious thinking : dismissing contingency and claiming that God rules the world amounts to justifying the unjustifiable. If one is to believe Bloy who claims that « chance is the fool's Providence », one is bound to admit that whatever misfortune falls upon one is not arbitrary but wanted. If I have cancer, it is no chance then, it is because I deserve it. This cancer is not only a blind biological fact but the fruit of God's intention ; in other words, God meant it. This cancer will be an uplifting experience and will cleanse my soul. It is to be viewed as something good.

Religious people sometimes answer that human beings are the only ones responsible for evil. In this respect, Bossuet wrote : « all that is good comes from God and all that is bad comes from us ». wars, terrorist attacks, poverty... are the result of our lack of solidarity and from our dog-eat-dog world. That is true. But how could a supposedly good and almighty God possibly let such things be ? If God is good, he is not almighty then and can therefore not prevent evil. If he is almighty, he is evil then. He could prevent evil but will not. But if he is both good and almighty, how is it that there is evil in this world and that the innocent are in pain ? This is our first objection to religious thinking : a God whose moral conduct is inferior to ours is no God : it is an absurdity of some kind. Our second objection is that some evil does not come from man but from nature : a natural evil : such is the case of natural disasters, of many diseases and of mortality itself. Being mortal, that is, ageing is an evil for which one is not responsible. Let us look forward to transhumanism.

Back in 1755, the Lisbon earthquake questioned the Enlightenment philosophers. This disaster was not man-

made and took a heavy toll : how could God have possibly wanted it ? In his *Letter to the Blind,* Diderot questions the state of those born blind. The latter cannot have sinned yet : how could they have been chastised since they are no sinners !? Here is yet another injustice which bears out the fact that the idea of God does not hold water.

What about Adam and Eve ! No need to remind the reader of the story. Since they sinned and we are descended from them, we keep footing the bill : rational, isn't it ?

Blaise Pascal (a great philosopher and defender of Catholicism) wrote in his *Pensées :* « we have to be born guilty, or else God would be unfair ».

We are therefore born guilty, which implies that we not only deserve « our » sufferings, but we must, through them, atone for our past crimes.

To commit suicide is then nothing but a way of escaping the trials that God has designed for us to cleanse our soul. It is therefore a cowardly and a morally wrong act. Someone who commits suicide is bound to end up in purgatory for he has bypassed the normal cleansing process. Suicide is therefore nothing but a sin.

To draw on another -albeit unorthodox- reference, Wolf Creek, season 2, in which Mick Taylor, the executioner quite perversely says to his victims : « we have been sent down here for our crimes. We shall not leave until we have paid off our debt. This is a plea. » This completely crazy and wacky statement from a psychopath is nonetheless an excellent summary of what is at stake in religious thinking. As we have sinned, we have a debt to settle with God, and the only way for us to settle that debt is through atoning for our sins hic and nunc. How could we know then that we have had

our fill of suffering !? « Do stay alive until you die ». Is there not any better incentive for … suicide ? …

Religious sophistry… : what an enduring success !… To view suffering as the price to pay for cleansing our soul may seem atrocious at first sight, and it is indeed. But if we consider that agony is to reveal the ultimate Truth, it therefore appears worthwhile.

Religious guilt thus makes our daily suffering understandable, which however bypasses angst and the absurd. What is horrible is not the suffering but the pointless suffering. In other words, it is not sado-masochism which fuels religion but its shrinking from contingency and the absurd.

Let us go further, those who commit suicide are bound to go through excruciating suffering in the Hereafter since they have deprived God of his privilege. Even Hamlet's soliloquy shows that suicide deprives man of the guarantee that he will be at peace afterwards. From an atheistic point of view, Hamlet could well end his woes by killing himself without any dreadful consequences for him. Life being no duty, « to be or not to be » is a question that one is at liberty to answer.

Morally speaking, as Woody Allen claims, God's existence is unsustainable. How can one reconcile God with Nazism or Stalinism ? « If God does exist, I hope he has a good excuse ! », Woody Allen. No matter how we insist that God is not implicated in evil and that his being is inaccessible to us, there is no reconciling the idea of God with suffering. Morally speaking, the idea of God does not hold water .

What of the purely metaphysical aspect of religion ? According to religion, God created the world and rules it

permanently. Likewise, he created us and is by our side permanently.

Phenomenology, a branch of philosophy with such prominent thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Sartre, refuted this thesis. Phenomenology is the study (=Logos) of phenomena (=what appears to us).

While religions say that God is the source of whatever exists, phenomenologists claim that it is the human being, as a living spirit, a thinking mind. Past, present and future exist only for a consciousness. When I am no longer conscious, nothing exists.

And yet, it does not mean that the world is but a figment of my imagination. It is real, but it is my consciousness that makes it exist. Nothing comes before me and nothing will come after me. When I am no more, I shall not be able to think so : total NOTHINGNESS. It is not God that sustains my existence but my consciousness.

As Heidegger, the founding father of phenomenology, writes, « we are the sheperds of Being ». it is indeed we that make Being be (although it is despite us). It is through us that Being is. Consciousness is the gravity centre of Being, the light without which everything would dissolve.

Everything in order to exist requires consciousness. With no more « I am », no more « there is ». Without me, nothing else. This reasoning can easily be verified through introspection. When immersed in meditation, I wonder what might have been but for me, and I cannot but come to the conclusion that nothing would have existed : sheer nothingness.

To dwell on the question of consciousness, I will refer you to supplement 1 and its poem « a Hymn to philosophy ». If we

are the source of everything, we are also the source of our values and good and evil do not exist within us or up in Heaven : those are constructs of consciousness. The universe is neutral and indifferent. As Stephen Kink writes in *Shining* , « the world does nor mean any evil but it does not mean any good either : it does not care about what happens. » Good and evil being notions inherent in man/woman, it is therefore rational to define good as what we desire and evil as what we do not desire. In his *Ethics (III,9),* Spinoza writes : « we do not aim at or hanker after something because it is good, but rather, we deem something good because we aim at and hanker after it ». In other words, it is not because something is good that we want it, but because we desire it that it is good. It is because we do not wish to be killed that we consider murder to be evil. The same goes for beauty : it is in the eye of the beholder, as the saying goes. Beauty does exist, but it is made to exist by consciousness.

A sexual relationship that is wanted by both partners is something good, unlike rape, sheer evil, when enforced on someone who refuses it. From a moral point of view, Rousseau in his *Social Contract* provides food for thought : it is worth noting, he says, that there are specific, individual desires that may conflict with another person's and as such, cannot and ought not to be held up as laws, unlike universal desires which do not stem from our biological or social specificities and may, as such, be held up as laws : this is the *general will* , to quote from Rousseau.

It follows that the right to painless suicide is something good for all those who endure too much suffering -physical and moral- and who wish to die peacefully. Some will object : « but their suicide will harm others ! » Sure, but for a human being to live for others, when he no longer wishes to live, means reifying him and flouting his sense of dignity,

which is bad. Human beings are not things, and they belong to noboby but themselves.

Our lives belong to us, and as such, we are free to quit it when we want. Painless suicide is therefore a right to be granted. Painless suicide is something good as it enables human beings to live and die in strict accordance with their sense of dignity without flouting others'. By contrast, banning (tacitly or explicitly) painless suicide is something bad and evil as it flouts human beings' sense of dignity when the latter wish to die and they are reified by this ban (= they would harm others by killing themselves and offend God and/or society). This ban sentences them to excruciating sufferings which conflict with their sense of dignity.

Chapter 5 : A plea against blaming suicide

Blaming paradoxically means encouraging suicide. To start with, enduring others' scorn or condescension is an altogether unpleasant experience that may lead one to nurture suicidal tendencies. As we crave love and recognition, we strive to exist in others' lives and suit the way they want us to be. It is tantamount to « persevering in our being » to quote Spinoza. The more we stick to the way others want us to be, the more fulfilling it is, that is by being like this or like that.

It follows that if I am defined as hardworking, I will strive to live up to this definition, and conversely, if I am defined as lazy, I will strive to be lazy, since in either case, those ways fulfil me. Only philosophical insight will help us prove that wrong : I am or I am not, but I am not more or less ! I do fully

exist : there is no such thing as living more or less. Existence knows no degrees of existing : there is no middle-ground.

Spinoza's « persevering in one's being » is misleading actually for it supposes two reifying errors which are morally devastating.

> We have a nature which defines us and which we cannot escape.

> We do not exist more or less.

For instance, a warrior cannot escape his warrior's nature no matter if he is much or not much of a warrior ; the same goes for a pen : a pen is a pen rather than more or less a pen. Likewise, a coward is a coward no matter how significant his cowardly act has been deemed. There is no choosing one's definition and the less we stick to our definition, the less dignified we are.

If one applies this erroneous and distorted « reasoning » to suicide and those who wish to commit suicide, everything gets terrifying : the one that wishes to die will be called « suicidal » as if such an adjective defined him. The suicidal person who does not commit suicide will never fully agree with his nature. It is only by committing suicide that he will realize that he is fully living : to stick to others' definition, he must die.

Malraux, in *La Voie Royale,* got it right : « the one that commits suicide is after an image that he made of himself » : one commits suicide only to feel one exists » ; such a statement is too radical, for many people kill themselves to end intolerable suffering. To die because one wishes to live : weird, isn't it ?

Those who tacitly ban painless suicide and unashamedly blame suicide might quite rightly be blamed for encouraging suicide. But for this tacit ban, one might assert that suicide could be avoided in quite a few cases.

In order not to fall prey to the social trap of the suicidal identity, let us bear in mind this Sartre quote from *l'Etre et le Néant (Being and Nothingness) :* « I am not what I am. » Indeed, as a human being endowed with consciousness, I cannot be defined. My social, biological or psychological features cannot define me. I am a consciousness of something (Husserl and « Intentionality »), and nothing else. This something is the world around us. Consciousness is always consciousness of what it is not. Definitions only apply to objects and consciousness is no object, as Seneca wrote : « the soul, that thing through which we avoid being defined ».

Acknowledging consciousness of oneself frees you from being defined by society and thereby being ascribed some identity with its subsequent deathly consequences. in a word, to understand that living knows no degrees frees you from the temptation to define yourself in order to feel that you are fully alive : Descartes and his Cogito in his *Discours de la Méthode (the Dicourse of/on the Method) :* « this proposal-I am therefore I am- is necessarily true every time I utter it or I construct it in my mind » (in *Metaphysical Meditations).* The only fact that I think testifies to my being. Consciousness is the sole reality principle. As long as I am conscious, I am sure that I am and that I exist : it is no use persisting in some kind of fictional being or persona. If a bad genius, Descartes goes on to explain in his *Meditations,* happened to fool me in every respect, the fact that I am fooled requires that I should be ; my doubting testifies to my being. I therefore may doubt everything but my existence. My sense of dignity arises from this « I am, I exist ».

Suicide is sometimes due to a wrong « cogito » : instead of saying to themselves « I think, therefore I am », some think to themselves « I work a lot, therefore I am », « I see a lot of people, therefore I am » or « I do many things, therefore I am »... all these reasonings suppose that I am more or less, according to my actions and external features. But the fact that one thinks proves that one is and that one is a hundred per cent (and not twenty per cent...).

Such wrong cogitos require that one persevere in one's being, that one is to conform to certain conditions : I am only if I work a lot... But existence is no construct. Then, to refuse to persevere in one's being should label me as a being lacking in something, that is a loser. If you do not do such or such things, you shall not be fully living, and anxiety cannot but be the outcome of such a wrong reasoning. That is tantamount to having to justify one's existence permanently although human being is a fact and cannot be conquered. Being is a consciousness and consciousness implies dignity.

Descartes is the best antidote to those who think wrongly : « I am, therefore I am » : being is not to be mistaken for having, the latter stemming from a conquest, an acquisition. There is no such thing as conquering one's being.

I think, therefore I am no object, therefore, I am free to commit suicide : it is my right. The right to painless suicide is the direct consequence of Descartes' Cogito.

My dignity has nothing to do with characteristics such as being obsessional or bipolar...

Painless suicide ought not to be granted to some who might be deemed worthy of it : the rich, the Bourgeois... and yet, we do know that those who are well-to-do can more easily

resort to painless suicide unlike the poor who have to struggle to reach their goal.

Let us recapitulate : the consequences of blaming suicide are :

1) scorn or condescension as leading to suicide

2) no need for recognition from others to feel one is fully living

There is a more subtle argument yet to be analysed.

Guilt is quite a burdening feeling to put up with, all the more so when one feels one is guilty of something that one must atone for.

The one who wishes to end his life is often the target of blaming : he is blamed for having suicidal or depressive thoughts, which denies his consciousness and reduces him to a feature.

In our society, suffering from depression and being suicidal amount to the same : you are a loser, you think badly… the guilt that he has to bear is ontological then. He is blamed for being who he is ! He is guilty of being who he is. From a legal point of view, a criminal is guilty of what he did and not of who he is. Strictly speaking, there is no criminal but only criminal acts, which does not mean that he should not be made to pay for what wrongdoing he committed. Although this is not our topic, to understand that we are but consciousness ought to dispel the very myth of the super serial killer. If killing does not make a killer out of us, what is the point of killing then ?

Likewise, there is no suicidal person ; there are but beings who wish to end their lives : it is therefore useless to make

them feel guilty. Whatever judgement stems from psychological having. To wish to die on no account impacts our being conscious-laden human beings.

If I am guilty of being what I am and who I am, I am ashamed of living then. Ashamed of enforcing my living presence upon others ; ashamed of breathing !

Guilt-laden, I may opt for suicide or I might as well go on living, but I shall have to make do with it and assume this guilt. How then ?

1) Sadism :

I am guilty : let that be ! I am evil, therefore, I shall act wickedly instead of feeling ashamed since I have been branded and labelled evil : I shall act accordingly. Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* : « if I cannot arouse love, I shall spread fright ».

Sadism enables one to derive pleasure from others' hatred. Sadism justifies the guilt one is made to bear and put up with, and even our sufferings, for it makes us truly guilty of our deeds. But ontological guilt is another matter ; better be guilty of a deed than guilty of being what/who one is. Then, committing crimes is a way out of ontological guilt. Sadism, for all those reasons, may be the answer to ontological guilt, a way of shunning shame. Some inner-city « hoodlums » identify with their having been labelled the « scum of the earth » and subsequently behave accordingly by espousing the sadistic cause.

2) Masochism :

To chastise oneself, to take one's revenge on oneself, to hate and torture oneself because one is guilty, one is wicked…

As with sadism, it means saying « yes, I am guilty ».

Yet, rather than happily assume one's guilt-ridden identity and persevere in one's being, one runs down one's being relentlessly, one ill-treats it and one's sole pleasure is the one derived from one's self-inflicted suffering : the essence of masochism. I am in pain because I deserve it. Life becomes meaningful as one atones for one's sins. Being suicidal in this society means being guilty (suicide is evil).

If one has a guilty conscience, one must chastise oneself to cleanse one's conscience.

Many people with suicidal tendencies who truly wish to die, cut their wrists or torture themselves in order to chastise themselves. The logical outcome of ontological guilt pertaining to suicide is therefore suicide. No matter how much I torture myself, I shall stay who I am, a poor suicidal wretch who does not deserve to be happy. I may resort to self-flagellation to ease the pain, but the ultimate way out is suicide.

Sadism and masochism are the two sides of the same coin. For the one who feels guilty, his life swings back and forth between those two poles : shame turned into perverted pleasure. The perverted pleasure of crime for the sadist and self-torture for the masochist and in both cases, the endorsement of guilt. These philosophical analyses enable us to grasp the fact that blaming suicide leads the one wishing for suicide to denigrate himself : this is morally outrageous.

If suicide is the logical outcome of our being labelled ontologically guilty, we must ponder Descartes : we are defined by consciousness, this is it. I may be guilty of some specific wrong deeds in my lifetime, but this is altogether

different . Ontological guilt is deathly, therefore pointless, therefore, plunging into sado-masochism is the wrong way.

Besides, suicide is no morally condemnable deed : the one who wishes to die ought not to be blamed for it, for his life is his and not anyone else's. The only evil is the suffering if dying is painful, hence the moral duty to offer a painless way of dying. We are not born guilty, no matter what hysterical religious people claim, therefore, we do not deserve to suffer.

It is because she was denied painless suicide that Angélique Flowers died a very painful death : she vomited her excrements : what is the point of all that ? To endorse that for God's sake or whatever is sheer cruelty.

« I do not offend the laws implemented against thieves when I travel with my belongings or when I spend my own money, nor do I offend those laws against arsonists when I burn my own wood. I am therefore not concerned by the laws implemented against murderers who took my life away », Montaigne, *Essais.* My life is mine, therefore, suicide is a right. He goes on to say : « the best present bestowed on us by nature is to have given us the very key to flee with » ; in other words, why should we remain locked up in life when we have the key to unlock that door ? Why should society go against the grain of nature ? Montaigne, all through his book, appears as a staunch defender of suicide, and his *Essais* are a plea for taking the guilt away from man, and that is precisely why, Blaise Pascal, the catholic thinker parted company with Montaigne whom he blames for condoning suicide : « Montaigne's faults are significant…/… He arouses some sort of nonchalance in salvation, fearing neither God nor man. His book does not encourage piety, not that it was meant to, but one should not turn away from piety though. One may forgive him for dealing with light,

voluptuous subjects here and there, but one cannot condone his pagan thinking on death. He advocates a cowardly and flabby way of dying all the way through ».

According to Pascal, salvation involves fear and penance rather than dying flabbily and cowardly. One is to die painfully. Here is old religious thinking once again whereby there is no such thing as painless dying for that is cowardly. God alone is the master of time : he is the one who decides when and how. « cowardly » cunningly associates guilt with suicide. To opt for suicide is cowardly ; « flabbily » is a sarcastic way to suggest « peacefully » to underscore that to want to die painlessly is cowardly : it is a wet blanket's desire, a poor wimp's : one might think one was in some school yard : « you, chicken ! ». This intellectual reasoning is no more than a school yard insult ! To such taunts, clever pupils do not respond but prefer leaving those « tough guys »...

if one deciphers Pascal's perverted way of thinking, one realises that cowardly and flabbily merely mean peaceful, but they do betray his submission to a fear of God and to the domination exerted by the Church on the faithful. Fear paralyses you. Those who are afraid are likely to be intimidated and they do not budge, they kowtow to you. Hence, Montaigne, once more : « the one who has learnt to die has ceased to serve ». Pascal does not wish people to learn to die, for he dreads their ceasing to serve the Church which is holding power.

Let us give up on wanting to blame suicide and instil guilt in those who nurture such a wish . Let us follow Kant's example by yearning to come of age, in the true Enlightenments' spirit. Let us hasten to savour life. What is cowardly is to leave someone dying a painful death.

Shopenhauer : « the one who ends his life wishes to live : he is but dissatisfied with the very conditions of his life ». The one wishing to die is a rebel then, and not a depressed one. He says NO to reality/the real ; it is morally right to refuse a situation which does not agree with one's dignity. That is why painless dying is our right. Nothing to be guilty of if you refuse the biological, social conditions in which you have been made to live.

Being rid of social and religious guilt, and being granted the necessary means for a painless way of dying, we shall live freely and not by constraint, which allows one to be happy, filled with a sense of cosmic serenity. Not to live because one has to but because one wants to. To say yes to life, to embrace it passionately. Not to be raped by life but to make love with it.

Chapter 6 : Against the logic of constant restlessness (« Divertissement » or Diversion after Blaise Pascal) which leads us to scotomize death.

Our capitalist society, by goading us into being happy and productive, prompts us to live as though we were immortal. « move forward, make it to the top, pile on the qualifications, rewards and the like... » : in other words, it denies, i e, scotomizes our very mortal condition.

Is there any place for someone ill in this dog-eat-dog world ? A human being is required to be « a piece of labour force »,

to quote Marx, but a sick person is obviously less enthusiastic, dynamic and productive : it is a far less efficient « piece of labour force ». We are not valued as human beings but as pieces of labour force, according to our jobs. This capitalist society's credo is : whoever is useless is worth nothing since society cannot thrive on him/her.

Hence, we are not kept from committing suicide out of love but out of interest. If we kill ourselves, we deprive this capitalist society of some precious labour force. It is then urgent that suicide be denied and banned. Banning suicide in order to maintain and safeguard workers (the unemployed, those living on meagre unemployment benefits as a potential labour force). Let us therefore discard the wrong and perverted premise whereby painless suicide is outlawed out of love ! Indeed, we are not kept from living in dire straits, from eating junk food and suffering from excruciating diseases out of sheer love. But we are prevented from accessing painless suicide to escape conditions that are against our dignity : what a strange kind of love !... true love cares for the good living conditions of human beings rather than prevent them from dying peacefully.

To understand how we came to such scornful capitalism, we must look back on the XVIII th century and the Enlightenment. Back then, as upheld in the Encyclopedia, the onus was on improving man's living conditions by making him happier and more free. Knowledge was construed as a way to understand the world and heal its woes by improving working conditions. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, firms and companies surged, making competition fierce, thereby compelling man to survive and making work worthless : one no longer worked to better man's life but to survive. That is exactly what Lipovetsky says in his book *The Era of Emptiness* (the right title for our

capitalist society) : « noble endings are dead, but no-one cares ». we do move forward but regardless of where and why : that is capitalism.

Thus, to compel man to work in order to survive is nothing less than reifying him. It follows that he is denied any intrinsic value. The one that does not serve society should not live. If a human being is treated like an end and not like a means, he must be treated accordingly by society no matter if he is not useful to it. The 1789 Revolution proclaimed that there is a Right to Live. Playing a social part is therefore not the very condition to living and living well.

Yet, our capitalist society flouts human rights. One has to be happy and productive and refrain from thinking about death, that is, be a smiling slave.

If one considers one's death and opts for lucidity, one is marginalised (death is a topic for those with psychological problems). If one lets oneself be carried away by this social trend, one shuns one's own rendez-vous with death. And even if one thinks about it, social pressure is such that one is deterred from contemplating it through the necessary means (painless techniques). The one that will stubbornly contemplate it is bound to « break the law » and be marginalised and be blamed for that. Unless one is determined, lucid, rebellious and plucky, one is bound to give up and give in to Diversion, as Pascal saw it, something relished and worshipped by our society.

Diversion is written with a capital « d » as it is a pascalian concept. Pascal was a staunch catholic : we saw how dogmatic some of his religious views were, but we must dissociate those from his philosophical analyses. Diversion comes from the Latin « divertere » i e to turn away from. Diversion then does not mean to have fun and relax, but to

do one's best to avoid, to shun something. According to Pascal, what we strive to forget is our ignorance and our own mortality. To indulge in Diversion means seeking to forget about oneself, to forget that we do not control everything. Any activity is a source of Diversion then : work is a case in point ! And it is a far more effective source than leisure since it numbs and dumbs you. Pascal wrote : « worries divert one ». leisure, by contrast, leaves you enough time to think about yourself. Material worries take you away from existential worries. Hence, a high liver and a devout mathematician may be very similar in that they seek to escape their mortal condition by celebrating (the high liver) and racking his brains over equations (the mathematician).

Here are a few samples from Pascal's *Pensées (from Diversion)* so that we may see the extent to which reality is scotomized.

« Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things . Despite those worries, he craves happiness, and wants nothing but happiness. But how should he achieve it ? It would be necessary that he be immortal, but not being so, he resolved to refrain from thinking about it.

Thus, men who are naturally conscious of what they are shun nothing so much as rest by fighting some obstacles and if they happen to have oversome them, rest being intolerable, because of the tediousness related to it, they must get away from it all and beg for uproar.

Some sweat away at their gambling or waging war or holding high positions not so much because there is much happiness to derive from those ; the happiness does not lie in getting the much wanted hare or the money they gambled for : were they given to them, they would turn

them down. It is not either that lust for danger that keeps them going, but the very worry that takes their minds off the thought and « diverts » them. That is why this man who lost his son a few months ago and was so troubled and oppressed this morning by lawsuits and quarrels, is not thinking about it any more. Do not be surprised, he is concentrating his attention on which way the boar will go that his dogs have been so boldly pursuing for the past six hours. That is all he needs. However sad a man may be, if you can persuade him to take up some diversion, he will be happy while it lasts, and however happy a man may be, if he lacks diversion and has no absorbing passion or entertainment to keep boredom away, he will soon be depressed and unhappy. Without diversion, there is no joy ; with diversion, there is no sadness. That is what constitutes the happiness of persons of rank, for they have a number of people to divert them and the ability to keep themselves in this state.

From childhood on men are made responsible for the care of their honour, their honour, their property, their friends, and even of the property and honour of their friends ; they are burdened with duties, language-training and exercises, and given to understand that they can never be happy unless their health, their honour, their fortune and those of their friends are in good shape, and that it needs only one thing to go wrong to make them unhappy. So they are given responsibilities and duties which harass them from the first moment of each day. You will say that is an odd way to make them happy : what better means could one devise to make them happy ? What could one do ? You would only have to take away all their cares, and then, they would see themselves and think about what they are, where they come from, and where they are going. That is why men cannot be too much occupied and distracted, and that is why, when they have been given so many things to do, if they have

some time off they are advised to spend it on diversion and sport, and always to keep themselves fully occupied. How hollow and foul is the heart of man ! »

Let us specify that for this text to be rightly appraised, the word « death » should be replaced by « mortality » : there is no such thing a being cured of death since death is no disease. It is nothing to us (Epicurus) since it is the very absence of suffering. Read further up for the distinction to be made between death and dying.

Without indulging in lengthy analysing, let us get straight to Pascal's thinking. Instead of facing the fact that we are mortal, we resolve to dance, play, hunt, gamble, solve mathematic puzzles : such is what is at stake with Diversion : to keep us from thinking about what hurts us, i e , our mortal human condition. And yet, it might be objected to Pascal that seeking refuge in religion through praying rather than face the prospect of nothingness carries Diversion one step further ! This has no better philosophical worth than hunting for a boar !

Rather than indulge in Diversion, let us assume our being mortal and let us go in quest of painless techniques. Painless dying ought to be a social matter and policy but this society is prey to Diversion. Were it not so, it would reconcile lucidity with happiness.

Thinking is treated with contempt in such a capitalist world. Thinking is synonymous with taking a break, a guilty one at that, from « the madding crowd » indulging in the rat race. It is viewed as a bug, so to speak, a waste of time, a weakness. One has to be constantly chirpy and full of gusto to move forward and keep consuming ! Meditation is a waste of time and this logic keeps us away from pondering the question of mortality, which results in leaving the sick

dying in horrendous conditions : such is the cost of a society guilty of Diversion.

Illusion is thus more morbid than lucidity, which this manifesto proposes as an alternative. Dying is then an event to be organised socially so that those dying should not be left to their own poor devices, isolated and locked up as they are in their excruciating pain : this stands to reason no matter how much one has thought about it.

Besides, one could even hypothise that dying might be construed as an intense event, an event endowed with solemnity, serenity, voluptuousness, and even something one relishes , were it organised in a painless way. A time for taking stock of our life, when we kiss our relatives farewell and when we make life meaningful. The « sarcocapsule » of Nitschke is a case in point. (according to an inventor, this machine would allow one to enjoy such a peaceful death that « one would ask for more »!). If death is something that we cannot shun, why let it be so horrible if one can make it smooth and pleasant ? Some reactionary minds will object to our speaking like the last decadent Man of Nietzsche (a little poison now and again makes dreams more pleasant. And a lot more poison to get it over with in order to have a pleasant death : Thus Spake/Spoke Zarathoustra, Nietzshe)... Anyway, this argument is as spurious as Pascal's « dying cowardly and flabbily » : let us waste no time expatiating on it.

If dying be necessarily painful, then the worst is yet to be. We shall never experience any ultimate relief, any peaceful ending when we are glad we have had a fulfilling life. On the contrary, if dying has been organised, we know that the worst shall be behind us some time. Our last chapter might be both peaceful and grandiose. Woody Allen says : « as long as man is mortal, he will never take it easy ». let us

alter the quote : « as long as man dies painfully, he will never take it easy ». Without any pain, dying will no longer stink to high Heaven, but will behold the Heavenly stars.

According to pro-life advocates, the prospect of a painless death might prompt us to die untimely, which is wrong ; but what is the point of living when life is worthless, and what does « dying at the right time » mean ? Montaigne in his *Essais* writes : « No-one dies untimely », i e, everyone dies at any time. « the point about living is not related to space but custom : some live very long without having truly lived ; your will will determine, rather than the number of years, whether you have had enough ».

Epicurus, in his Letter to Menoeceus advocates the same view : « it is not always the longer life but the more pleasant one that one is eager to enjoy ». Rousseau, in Emile or Education takes up the idea altogether : « the one that has lived longest is not the one that has piled on the years but the one that has enjoyed life to the full. Take this man : he lived to be one hundred but actually died in his prime ! He would have been better off being buried in his prime then, had he lived till then » !

Jacques Lacarrière in his *Chemin Faisant* (in which he tells of a walk which lasted several months across the French countryside) writes about a 105-year-old man called Brasdargent, whose story is told by Rétif ; let us quote from it :

« this very old man considered old age as something downright useless. Rétif and him were walking when a boy came up to him and said : « how lucky you are, Brasdargent man, to have seen so much and to remember so much ! » the old man replied : « far from it, boy, do not envy me ! It has been forty years since I lost my childhood comrade and I

have been wandering in my homeland and family : my grandchildren look upon me as an alien ; no-one ever looks at me as someone like him, a friend, a comrade. Too long a life is a burden. Here is the fifth generation : those great grandchidren of mine are like strangers to me. They do not relate to me and are even afraid of me ! Here is the naked truth my dear boy, rather than the fine words of those city sophists ! » Rétif uses him to voice his feelings. But one feels that this is the old man's view, and not the child's or an adult's. One does not become a patriarch but a monster when one is so old and made into an alien. There is no such thing as immortality, except for -perhaps- a collective one.

The point is not to prompt the very old to die ! But let us refrain from making them feel guilty if they wish to die if they feel they have lived long enough. When life is dull, it should not be a constraint. An old person belongs to no-one but him/herself : why should one let him/her be a burden to him/herself ; she/he ought to be free to depart when she/he wishes to.

It now stands to reason how frightening and morally outrageous Diversion is. To divert oneself means that one seeks to shun something, i e our death. If one keeps from thinking about it, it is the best way for it to be horrible.

Denying reality makes one unhappy : it is synonymous with anguish since the problem is unsettled. By contrast, lucidity is the key, the solution, the backbone of happiness. By tackling the problem head on, we may anticipate it and organise it ; it may then become a social matter. Only a society freed from the burden of Diversion and capitalism will be able to solve the problem of mortality and pave the way for a peaceful life freed from the numbing fear of a painful death.

Chapter 7 : For the social planning of the right to painless suicide

Let us tackle as the very emblem of our fight for freedom a thought-provoking extract from Kant's *What is the Enlightenment ?* , as it encapsulates the very tenets of our philosophy.

What is the Enlightenment ? Man's coming of age, his achieving majority, his renouncing the minority for which he is responsible.

By minority, we mean his inability to use his understanding without anyone's help and assistance ; this minority for which he alone is responsible not so much because he is lacking in understanding but because he is not brave enough to decide to use it without someone's authority upon him.

Sapere aude ! Be brave enough to use your own understanding : such is the Enlightenment's spirit and motto.

Laziness and cowardice are the two causes which account for the fact that a great number of men and women decide to vegetate in minority, leaving it to others to rule over them.

How convenient it is to remain in a state of minority !

If at my disposal, I have a book, a doctor, a director that act in place of my own understanding, why should I complain and exert myself !?

I need not think ! As long as I can pay !

Others will think for me.

Those tutors have been clever enough to show their cattle that straying away from their enclosure is painful and dangerous.

Yet, that is not so dangerous as falling once or twice might teach them a lesson in the end, but they are brainwashed into shrinking from walking by themselves and they thereby opt for minority as a natural state : theirs.

Let us achieve majority, let us not be afraid to think for ourselves, let us use our reason without anyone's authority, let us make our own choices. Let us not let those tutors make decisions for us !

If we consider that our lives do not agree with our sense of dignity, let us not let any tutor decide for us and prevent us from dying peacefully. Let us throw off the yoke of this state of minority, no matter how seducing minority may seem ; to decide to die when we want to, we must enjoy the right to access the suicidal kit : the right to painful suicide is a consequence of the Enlightenment. Thus, this Kant text is worth reading over and over again.

Hence, is it not legitimate that one should, as soon as one is 18, access suicidal kits from the pharmacist's ? Those would come along with recommendations as to how to use them.

The person that wants to terminate his life peacefully would just have to go to the pharmacist's (no need to undergo a psychological expertise any more) ; he or she would just have to fill in a form and sign it, and the pharmacist would keep a record of his purchase. A post mortem would be the best bulwark against poisoning. Let it not be said that those

kits would make poisoning easier : some berries and mushrooms do the job far better !

Those possible drifts and other questionings will be solved if one takes the necessary time to prepare for it and legislate.

To make sure that someone healthy does not want to die on an impulse, one should see to it, within two or three weeks, that his decison is sensible : this waiting period would become a law.

No need to say that those kits should not be left lying about at children's disposal…

for the right to painless suicide goes hand in hand with majority ; before he turns 18, the individual is under someone's legal responsibily, all the more so as teenage is such an unsteady period ; only those minors enduring pain - both physically and psychologically- will have to turn to their tutors and doctors for such a decision.

Awareness campaigns will help people become aware of this scourge and the freedom to end it peacefully. Philosophy will be taught to future doctors so that they may become humanists who do not look upon their patients as objects or mere bodies but as beings.

On an individual scale, it will still be possible to deter someone from committing suicide (Camus : « a human being must be prevented »), but on a social scale, it will no longer be compulsory to deter someone from committing suicide or keeping someone artificially alive. On a social scale, painful suicide will be a right, for our life is ours.

The means to achieve a painful death do exist, but the will to provide them is still wanting.

Let us get over our fear of death by making painless death accessible for all !

The right to suicide will not settle all the biological and social issues ; it will enable us not to be made biologically and socially made to live. It will enable a person to discard a life that fouls his sense of dignity.

Life will cease to be a rape as we will be able to part with it.

With the legalisation of painless death, there will come the Dawn of a civilization that truly honours the Enlightenment's spirit.

Conclusion

We are not objects, we are human beings. Our lives do not belong to anyone, nor do they belong to society or to State. No-one, ever, can claim to oblige us to live for someone, for society or for the State if we do not wish to live for ourselves. Painless suicide is our right. Let us hasten to conquer this right for our dignity not to be flouted any more.

Supplement 1 : A hymn to philosophy : Je suis la source absolue*

L'Humanité, hélas, depuis son premier âge,

Vit dans un noir chaos et sème le carnage.

Dans la vaste Nature ou dans la société,

L'univers est toujours un lieu d'hostilité.

Notre raison se noie dans les flots du non-sens,

D'infâmes scélérats gouvernent sans bon sens,

Dans de hideux marais la justice s'enlise,

Le cancrelat jouit, le grand aigle agonise.

Mais, dès l'Antiquité, un rayon de lumière

A osé traverser notre froide Ténèbre :

Contre le joug pervers des terreurs religieuses,

Contre l'autorité des croyances captieuses,

Contre l'indifférence aux problèmes humains,

Contre la tyrannie de tous nos désirs vains...

Ô Ange ! Esprit sacré ! Femme au corps lumineux !

Ta voix perce toujours le silence omineux

Du terrible univers où nous sommes jetés.

Les touts premiers humains que tu as rencontrés,

Tu les as foudroyés par l'étonnement d'être

Et ils se sont, alors, demandés... « pourquoi naître ?

- Pourquoi sommes-nous là ? Pourquoi y-a-t-il un monde ?

- Et peut-on vivre bien sur une Terre immonde ?

- Être heureux quand le faible est mangé par le fort

- Et quand les plus pervers sont les élus du Sort ? »

Alors, ils marchent seuls, avec calme et patience,

Sur les sentiers ronceux de la noble sapience.

Amour de la sagesse et de la vérité,

Lutte contre la nuit et quête de clarté,

Soif de contemplation, de vertu, de beauté,

De justice, d'amour et de fraternité,

Désir d'explications et de compréhension,

C'est toi, philosophie ! Mon ange, ma passion !

Quelle est, amis lecteurs, l'origine du monde ?

Le feu ? La terre ? L'air ?... L'éther ? L'apeiron ? L'onde ?

Les dieux se prélassant dans leurs contrées sublimes ?

Un Dieu resplendissant jusqu'au fond des abîmes ?

Le sexe d'une femme au comble de sa gloire ?

L'atome ? Le big bang ? Ou la matière noire ?

Non, rien de tout cela... Quand satisfaits, l'on pose

Qu'une cause première explique toute chose,

Cette cause est sans cause, et donc inexpliquée,

Et la philosophie en rien plus avancée.

« A produit l'univers... », par quoi A est produit ?

« A est produit par B... », par quoi B est produit ?

Même en continuant ainsi toute une vie,

Nous buterions toujours sur la même aporie.

« L'origine du monde » est un concept fumeux

Qui plonge la raison dans des étangs brumeux :

Sa nature serait de n'avoir nulle cause,

Or, rationnellement, rien n'arrive sans cause !

L'origine n'est donc qu'un fantôme trompeur

Qui, scientifiquement, n'a aucune valeur.

« Du monde, j'ai enfin découvert l'origine ! »

« Mais l'origine – enfin ! - de la dite “origine” ?

- Vous avez seulement déplacé la question

- Et n'avez apporté aucune explication. »

« Pourquoi sommes-nous-là ? Et pourquoi le réel ? »

La science est condamnée au silence éternel.

Mais la philosophie a enfin décelé

Le principe premier de la réalité.

Elle s'est baptisée “phénoménologie”

Afin d'interroger la source de la vie.

Par quoi le réel est ? Et par quoi il perdure ?

Est-ce en raison des lois de la grande Nature ?

Est-ce par la bonté du Seigneur tout-puissant ?

Ô pure vérité, simple à glacer le sang !

C'est moi, oui, et moi seul, qui fait être le monde !

Avant moi, pas de monde... après moi, plus de monde !

Ce n'est que maintenant que l'univers demeure !

Quand je ne serai plus, - or il faut que je meure,

Ô, il n'y aura plus rien ! Triomphe du néant !

Car tout aura chuté dans un gouffre béant !

Cessons d'hypostasier les choses matérielles

Car celles-ci, jamais, ne seront éternelles,

Mais, représentations suspendues à l'esprit,

Dépendantes de lui, conditionnées par lui,

Elles explosent quand, mourant, je disparais...

Toute substance, aussi, se perd dans les marais.

Matière, de l'esprit tu n'es qu'une hypostase

Qui donne à la raison une stupide extase

Lorsqu'elle s'imagine expliquer la conscience

Par ta réalité : vanité de la science !

La conscience ne peut être décortiquée,

Encore moins causée, ou encore expliquée ;

Car elle est invisible et tout la présuppose ;

Sans elle plus rien n'est, de tout elle est la cause !

Je suis là sans raison, mais, berger malgré moi,

Je fais advenir l'être, sans savoir pourquoi...

Mais le réel n'est pas qu'une idée de l'esprit :

Je sens qu'il me résiste et même qu'il me fuit,

Nos faibles mots échouent à saisir son essence,

Son chaos se dérobe aux canevas du “sens” ;

Il se révèle alors comme extériorité

Et atteste par là de son altérité.

Non, le réel n'est pas qu'une hallucination,

De l'esprit délirant spectrale projection,

Mais un tissu solide et inassimilable

Bien différent de moi, bien solide et palpable.

Mais sa réalité suppose ma conscience,

Sans moi, plus de réel, plus d'autre et plus de science.

Eh oui ! C'est mon regard qui fait être les choses !

Et tout s'évanouit dans mes paupières closes.

L'esprit est un flambeau qui allume la Vie.

Oui, tu me l'a montré, belle Philosophie !

Et quand s'éteint alors son auguste lumière,

*L'univers disparaît dans la froide Ténèbre.**

**To preserve the rhymes, this poem isn't translated.*

Supplement 2 : An extract from « Le Baron de Torlune », Gabriel Noncris

« Since we have been dining and chatting (the Baron to his guest), I am surprised that you still have not asked me a question…

-What question ?

-You do wish to become independent, freed from men's sway, don't you ?

-Indeed, hence my staying with you.

-Why is it so ?

-Well, because YOU have freed yourself from men's sway !

-Really ? What makes you think so ?

-You fend for yourself in nature and with nature, so you do not need others ; is that not crystal clear ?

-No ! That is rather as muddy as some marsh is !

-What are you getting at, Anastase ? I am listening to you !

-No need to live in and with nature and be self-sufficient to free oneself from men's sway. Sooner or later, mortal

diseases strike you and if you do not die instantly, they torture you for days and weeks and months and years…

-I know, but this is how the ball bounces, right !?

-But we can cope with that, believe me ! Let me get to my point : there are mortal diseases but there are also accidents that can leave you at someone's entire disposal. I am 66…

-66, really ? I thought you were far younger ! Your living in keeping with nature is the key, right !?

-No doubt, but, please, do follow my reasoning. I am 66, which means that old age and death are looming ahead ! I have but a few years left to enjoy my autonomy. Do you really think I shall end my life in an old people's home or some hospital ?

-Anastase, I do not know what to answer…

-You do know that my sense of honour would discard such self-degradation… To linger in a vegetative state and have my butt washed by someone… is that not altogether degrading !? More than a rape ? No sense of human dignity left when you come to that…

-I do know, but can this be avoided ?

-One can die in time.

-Do you mean… suicide ?

-Sorry to be blunt about it, Christophe, but you are still so much of a city-dweller polluted by prejudice ! Of course, I mean suicide. Any mortal should consider it. Nature cares about species but not about individuals. Thus, it does not care about the way we die ; hence, we must see to it

ourselves. Would you really like to end up as some kind of vegetable in someone's hands and endure excruciating sufferings ?

-Definitely not indeed…

-Then, you must think about suicide. You must think about how to die when your life has become intolerable.

-I must admit you are right, no matter how much it saddens me… one cannot be free without thinking about our own death.

-Right.

-That being said, your solution does not quite please me ; there remain quite a few clouds in my mind… How can one be sure, dear Anastase, that we shall be courageous enough to commit suicide when we wish to ? Besides, as death is painful, aren't we bound to die defeated by suffering and anguish ? How horrible…

-No, Christophe, if we want to die, we need the right means, for dying requires no form of courage, but only a strong determination… the right means is a painless means.

-Die painlessly ? How is that possible ?

-It is indeed, thanks to medical progress.

-Yes, but… forget it…

-Please, do state your view ! I am open to any form of contradiction no matter how blunt I may sound.

-Well, you will think that I'm being fussy, but by resorting to those medicines, you make yours products that you haven't

made yourself, so you depend on those chemists, don't you ?

-You' re so right ! How perceptive of you ! Here is my answer : just as I was thrown by some into this absurd ocean called life, I demand that those who did so help me get out of it !

-You have a point ! Did you… find those drugs ?

-I did. I have made some beverage, a mixture of sleeping pills and painkillers ; I will tell you more sometime. this beverage will maim my nervous system, so that I am sure I will die painlessly and sink into eternal sleep : no more agony whatsoever.

-That indeed is undebatable, but… what if your beverage becomes adulterated if you live longer than you think !?

-It might indeed, but I have plenty of others in some hiding place of mine… just in case…

-How resourceful of you ! I am really glad I met you ; you have dispelled quite a few doubts and fears within me.

-I, too, am glad, dear brother, and this pays tribute to your will to understand, for I could never have made my point, had you not wanted to listen to me and grasp my reasoning.

-I do know quite a few people who would have considered you to be nuts or depressed or raving mad !…

-Indeed !! But let us deal with that when they experience agony : they shall not be proud and show off, believe me ! They will regret not having secured their own beverage… but it will be too late…

-Sure !

-The Stoics used to say that fearing death marred our lives and enslaved us. But thanks to that beverage, I do not fear death, I feel free, totally independent, freed from others' sway and totally happy… and I shall die in cold blood, rather than defeated by suffering and anguish, as you thought, I shall die a free man, both joyful and serene.

-That is amazing ; I think you went further than all philosophers in their pondering over death, and you have solved the matter…

-Solved in its physical dimension. But the metaphysical anguish pertaining to what awaits us as we die remains unsolved.

-Are you religious ?

-You're barking up the wrong tree !! Certainly not !! I leave those religious drugs to the weak. As for emptiness, our ultimate destination, it does not scare me. »

Gabriel Noncris, *Le Baron de Torlune*

Table of contents

Preface.....

Introductory texts

Preamble

Chapter 1 : Fighting against the absurd so that living may become a deliberate choice

Chapter 2 : The opportunity of painless suicide : prompting one to live

Chapter 3 : To live and to die in accordance with one's dignity : refusing too much suffering

Chapter 4 : Against the sophistry of Fundamentalism

Chapter 5 : A plea against blaming suicide

Chapter 6 : Against the logic of constant restlessness (« Divertissement » or Diversion after Blaise Pascal) which leads us to scotomize death.

Chapter 7 : For the social planning of the right to painless suicide

Conclusion

Supplement 1 : A hymn to philosophy : Je suis la source absolue*

Supplement 2 : An extract from « Le Baron de Torlune », Gabriel Noncris